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What agricultural extension is

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What Agricultural Extension Is

The information contained in this leaflet was first presented by Dr. C. B. Smith in an address before the annual conference of the extension staff, United States Department of Agriculture, in January 1944. American agriculture can never repay Dr. Smith for the contributions he made through 30 years of tireless service to mold extension work along democratic lines. The foundations of extension work are the same as the foundations of democracy. They rest on the principle that only an informed people can be a free people, that education is one of the vital links in the democratic process. Extension work will be a part of our agriculture as long as our country exists as a free nation.

M. L. Wilson,
Director of Extension Work.

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Preface

Agricultural extension probably has a slightly different meaning to every person who works in it, or who attempts to state its objectives.

Without going into any great detail, I present here, in rather general terms, some of my own views on what extension is.

If I were speaking to people less acquainted with every phase of extension than yourselves, I might be a little more specific.

Moreover, if I spoke to you tomorrow instead of today, I might change my views and present the matter to you a little differently, for agricultural extension is a mobile organization. It has not yet become frozen in its methods or its outlook.

Today, in extension, we engage boldly in some things, such as recreation, choruses, debates, and pageants, that we spoke about softly 20 years ago. Extension will grow in scope and content as fast as we and all rural people enlarge our outlook and desires. Extension changes and it grows!

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What Agricultural Extension Is

By C. B. Smith

Former Assistant Director of Extension Work

Agricultural extension in the United States is teaching. It is teaching that is outside the research laboratories and classrooms and beyond college and school walls. We have had 30 years' experience now in an organized national way in doing agricultural extension work in the United States. What government and people have mutually agreed to do during that time for the betterment of agriculture, homemaking, and rural life constitutes agricultural extension in the United States. Agricultural extension *is* then what agricultural extension *does*.

Agricultural Extension Teaches Through Demonstration and Doing

Agricultural extension is a peculiar kind of teaching. It is teaching not so much out of books or by means of lectures as it is by observation and doing things—participation by rural people themselves in their own teaching. Those who take part in extension work with their hands as well as with their minds. They grow a crop or feed animals, make a dress, prepare a balanced meal, or take part in a meeting, act as chairman of a committee, visit and study other farms or homes, collect information and help to interpret it, and observe and take part in the operation of a cooperative buying and marketing association, cooperative creamery, or other rural organization. Agricultural extension teaching in the United States emphasizes doing and participation by each member of the rural family cooperating in the work. They not only do things, but do them the better way. Education comes from doing things through use of the latest knowledge and the best techniques—through some change in normal routine methods.

Agricultural Extension Is Based on Agricultural Research and Training

The first concept of agricultural extension in the United States is that it is an educational organization designed to carry to rural people

the studies, the teaching, and the results of research by the State agricultural colleges, State experiment stations, and the United States Department of Agriculture and to help them apply these teachings and research findings in the improvement of the farm, the home, the rural community, rural institutions, and rural life.

Had we not had one or more agricultural colleges in every State in the Union to train men and women in agriculture and home economics and teaching methods, had we not had one or more agricultural experiment stations associated with these agricultural colleges in every State and Territory in the United States, and had we not had a great Federal Department of Agriculture to do research work in every field of agriculture and home economics, it is probable that we never should have had a Nation-wide agricultural extension service.

The national extension program is based then on the fact that the National Government and the State government have, as a result of their studies and research work, a body of information and facts to extend. It is a fundamental to successful extension that government have knowledge and facts as a basis for any national extension program. Agricultural colleges and agricultural experiment stations are to agricultural extension what strong foundations are to a house.

Agricultural Extension Is Based on Local Knowledge and Experience

In addition to what government has as a basis for an agricultural extension program, extension forces in the United States have learned that rural people themselves are experimenters and students of agriculture and of rural life, and that in every rural community there are a few outstandingly successful farmers and homemakers who have learned how to farm successfully right in that community. They have learned, too, that these rural people have a large amount of local knowledge based on experience, which, if assembled and made known to all farmers and farm families in the community, would serve greatly to improve agriculture and rural life there.

Extension agents in the United States survey, tabulate, analyze, evaluate, and help rural people to apply this local experience and knowledge

in their development of an extension program for each rural community. And this local knowledge, understanding, and experience are about as basic to successful extension work in the community as is the extension material brought in by extension agents from Federal and State government sources.

We see then that extension not only carries information from government to rural people, but searches out local information and analyzes local conditions as a basis for its program. Extension in practice studies as well as extends. It does research as well as extension. It recognizes, in building its teaching programs, local facts as well as government data. Such recognition is basic to good extension and gives it standing in the eyes of the farmer.

Agricultural Extension Is Designed To Build Rural People and To Improve Agriculture

Extension is an educational agency that not only helps rural people to increase their efficiency and their income but also helps to build those people themselves into understanding, accomplishing, self-confident, capable men, women, and youth, with vision and leadership. This building of rural people is the ultimate purpose of extension.

Agricultural extension in the United States makes rural people partners with government in the selection, financing, and direction of local extension agents. This is an educational process. Farmers and their families take part in making local surveys for getting and interpreting local practices and data upon which local and State extension programs are integrated and built. This is an educational experience. The farmer carries out the demonstration and explains its meaning to his neighbor. He helps in the development of rural organizations that may best serve his needs and those of his family. He is encouraged to take part in committee work, to speak at meetings, hold office, and do other work that will give him experience in guiding a cooperative or promoting the social, recreational, and civic welfare of the community. These are educational processes that help to bring satisfaction to the individual and give meaning to rural life. Extension that does not have for its

ultimate purpose the building and growth of rural men, women, and youth has not caught the spirit of extension but is dealing with its bones.

Agricultural Extension Studies Its Job

Agricultural extension is an educational agency that studies its job. Extension work may be done in many ways. But to do this work costs money. Which ways bring the largest returns for the least cost? What is the relative importance in extension of demonstrations, lectures, fairs, meetings, press news, letters, publications, camps, short courses, automobile tours, radio, plays, pageantry, bands, choruses, discussion groups, schools of philosophy? What results are we getting for the money expended? Extension studies the field and finds out the facts so that it may be intelligent in planning its program and using public money. This is just another way of saying that agricultural extension studies as well as extends. It knows what it is doing, the results it is getting, where it is going, and the whys of it all. Studying the job is the beginning of progress.

The Field of Agricultural Extension

What is the field of extension? As we have seen it develop in the United States, extension is as broad as all agriculture and home economics.

Whatever is taught in our colleges of agriculture, whatever is made the basis of research in our agricultural experiment stations, or Federal Department of Agriculture, or whatever discoveries are made anywhere that affect agriculture, these things in their practical aspects are legitimate matters for agricultural extension forces to carry to rural people to help them in their business of farming, homemaking, and living.

Extension agents explain to rural people all State and Federal laws affecting agriculture and show them how to take advantage of such laws. They do not, however, administer such laws or, under normal conditions, take part in their enforcement except as they deal with them from an educational standpoint. Extension agents are not snoopers or policemen. They do not enforce the payment of Federal income or local taxes or the payment of interest on the farm mortgage. The extension agent's business is to help the farmer increase his efficiency and

income and to help him find satisfaction and growth in rural life for himself, his family, his neighbors, and his institutions. The farmer looks upon the extension agent as a friend and counselor, not as a white-collar official. And that is the way we would have it.

Some concrete objectives of agricultural extension are:

1. To bring the farmer the knowledge and help that will enable him to farm still more efficiently and to increase his income.
2. To encourage the farmer to grow his own food, set a good table, and live well.
3. To help the members of the farm family to a larger appreciation of the opportunities, the beauties, and the privileges of country life, and to know something about the world in which they live.
4. To promote the social, the cultural, the recreational, the intellectual, and the spiritual life of rural people.
5. To place opportunity before rural people whereby they may develop all their native talents through work, recreation, social life, leadership.
6. To build a rural citizenry, proud of its occupation, independent in its thinking, constructive in its outlook, capable, efficient, self-reliant, with a love of home and country, in its heart.

Agricultural Extension May Act as an Emergency Agency

Agricultural extension may take on additional duties in time of great emergency, distress, or war. When floods overflow the country or hurricanes devastate a district, extension agents in those areas are among the first to step in and organize help. In time of war, extension forces act as an agent of the Federal Government in dealing with rural labor, war supplies, sale of war bonds, and the like. In such times the agricultural extension service adds to its roles as teacher and educator that of a service man or woman, or of a propagandist, or acts in any role that will relieve distress or help to win the war.

These extra duties are dropped when the emergency is met or the war is over. And the extension agent goes back to his or her normal role of teacher, educator, builder, and counselor.

Agricultural Extension Agents Find and Report Problems for Research

Extension has an important function in the agricultural research program of the Nation. Extension agents located permanently in every rural county of our country and living and working constantly with rural people acquire an intimate knowledge of their farm, home, and community problems — technical, economic, social, educational, and civic. Those problems that require further study or research are carried by extension agents to their State experiment stations and to the Federal Department of Agriculture for solution. Extension agents thus not only carry out information from the various agencies of government to rural people, but act as the agents of rural people in carrying problems back to government agencies for study and solution.

Summary

In closing, we would say, as at the beginning, that in the United States agricultural extension *is* what agricultural extension *does*. Its normal and primary function is that of teacher, counselor, and educator in all matters affecting rural people and rural life. But agricultural extension is also a government agency that reaches into every rural community in the United States and its Territories and is immediately available to the State and the Nation for meeting the temporary demands of any emergency, whether of war, flood, drought, disease, or other disaster.

It is a partnership agency in which the officials of government—Federal, State, and county—sit in council with rural people and together analyze local conditions, take stock of their resources, and make and help to carry out programs for the financial, educational, and social benefit of the community and its individual members. This partnership of government and people working and planning together is the strength of the agricultural extension system in the United States.

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